

MARCH 3, 2024 FPC PORT HURON SERMON: HOW TO PRAY (Preaching Series: Christian Disciplines) SCRIPTURE: Various Verses from I King 8 v. 22-24, 30-32, 33-34, 52-55; Matthew 6: 5-14

NEW PREACHING SERIES

We are into a new Preaching Series for the month of March—Christian Disciplines

First, a disclaimer—If you were to get a book on Christian Disciplines: perhaps some of the disciplines we will explore may not be there. I have picked the Christian disciplines, for this month of March, based on the needs of living a better life in Jesus, and based on the cultural/societal landscape in which we live. The Christian disciplines that we will explore, hopefully, will help us to more fully live the Christian faith and share the goodness of living life, Putting our trust and faith in Jesus Christ.

DEFINITION OF DISCIPLINE

First, let's define discipline. Discipline almost always involves "training"—In Scripture, many times this refers to "training up a child"—we are all children of God. We realize that Discipline—working on the Christian virtues that we all want in our lives, Take time and a lot of PRACTICE. Those of us who are parents, know that training up a child to walk in the ways of goodness and love and kindness—takes a lot of work and WHOLE LOT OF PRACTICE on their part AND whole lot of PATIENCE on the part of the parent. Same with us: We are children of God and God is our Father. Being disciplined, in loving God and loving others, takes a lot of practice on our part and a lot of patience on the part of God the Father.

THIS PAST WEEK

I think God has a sense of humor (I will talk about this next Sunday—how to laugh) because often when I am going to preach on a certain topic, God intervenes during the week and seems to say: "Have you experienced this? Have you seen this?" "Have you read this?" This Past Wednesday night: We had an ecumenical Lenten Prayer Worship time, right here in this sanctuary. Many pastors from this area were here—The music was great—amazing acapella harmony. The praying was good. The topic that we prayed about was the Government—pretty serious stuff. Local, state, nation, world. But it was during our time of prayer that a little 4 year-old girl ran up and down the aisle. Some might say she was undisciplined—a distraction to our seriousness. Not to me—I had two thoughts: First thought: When children came to Jesus, they probably weren't very disciplined. Probably not prim and proper as they are often portrayed in various paintings. They probably picked their nose; kicked off their sandals; ran around, teased each other. But Jesus did not send the children away.

In fact, Jesus scolded the disciples for doing just that—trying to send the children away. Perhaps the disciples thought the children were a distraction from the serious message and prayers of the Messiah, Jesus. So my second thought was this, about the seriousness of our prayers. We do get distracted in our prayer time—In fact, sometimes we get so distracted, not necessarily by children, but by our phones, our daily activities, our aches and pains, our work habits—We get so distracted that the discipline of prayer doesn't even happen and it doesn't even occur to us that perhaps the discipline of prayer might help in all those other areas of our lives.

THURSDAY NIGHT—SC4 PRAYER WORSHIP

On Thursday of this past week, I was invited to participate in the Prayer Worship at SC4 (St. Clair Community College—right here in Port Huron) with a bunch of college students. It was the Intervarsity Ministry that sponsored it, headed up by a local pastor, Joe and a campus pastor, Chad, who is a Presbyterian from Flint. During our time together, we prayed for college and university campuses—students, faculty, supporters—All across the nation, and particularly here at SC4, Port Huron. It was a wonderful time to raise up the concerns and joys of this college campus. And several of the students prayed with great sincerity to a God, whom they knew well (intimately.) It gave me hope that even young people can sense the power of prayer which can sustain and strengthen them through all of life's circumstances.

OTHER THINGS ABOUT THE DISCIPLINE OF PRAYER

As I said, God has a sense of humor, that when I am working on a sermon, God asks have you read this? On March 1 (this last Friday), I am reading my Upper Room Devotional very early in the morning and the title of the devotional is: "A Pattern of Prayer"—really, God??? Hit me over the head with a 2 by 4.

The lesson for the day is this: When we want to improve spiritually, we have to set specific goals, just like when we want to improve our health, we often set exercise goals. Susan Maas who wrote the devotion specifies three specific goals for developing our faith: Read a chapter a day from the Bible. Pray for a set amount of time every morning; And find an accountability partner to hold you to your reading of the Bible and praying daily, **until the habit becomes a natural part of your life.**

The last line in the devotional for this past Friday is this: "Morning walks can improve our health, but walking with God enriches the soul."

TITLE OF THE SERMON: HOW TO PRAY

I titled the Sermon: How to Pray because there are some techniques, we can employ which will help us “practice” prayer until it becomes a natural habit in our lives.

Here are my suggestions: Listen to others pray: Every Thursday morning I go to a Prayer Group of pastors who pray. I rarely pray because I am listening to their prayers and I realize, in my heart, they have said what I would have said. There was a line in our scripture from Matthew today that says: “When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their **many words**. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.” Now some people think if God already knows what I need, why do I need to pray? Because every Parent—wants to hear their children ask them for good things; especially If it is good for the child. The point that Jesus is making: “Simple is best.” (“Make it Simple, Stupid.”) Just take a look at the Lord’s Prayer—not many words—pretty simple—but it covers the ACTS of prayer.

TEACHING CHILDREN TO PRAY/ADULTS TO PRAY

When I teach children about prayer: It goes like this, as I explained in the Children’s Message: **Yeah God** (you are so good!); **Sorry**, I know I’ve done wrong. **Thank you** for your love and your forgiveness. **Help** me; Help my family and Help my friends. Help the world. It’s all about **simply praying**. Nothing fancy. You are just talking to your Father—Talking to your Friend Jesus. **Same goes for Teaching Prayer to Adults: We just have Bigger Words: Adoration**—affirming God’s goodness; **Confession**—Confessing our wrongdoings, our sins and asking for forgiveness so we can overcome those errant ways.; **Thanksgiving**—Giving thanks to God for what we see, feel and hear around us—everyday. **Supplication:** Ask for what we and others need from God—trusting that it is in God’s will and knowing that God is the Great presence, provider, and peace in our lives.

SCRIPTURE SOLOMON AND JESUS

If you look closely at the two prayers chosen for today—Solomon’s prayer and Jesus’ prayer, all the Elements of Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication are there. **Solomon is the King of Israel**—the leader of the Israelites and he leads them in prayer, after having completed the building of the Temple in Jerusalem. The Temple was a huge project—accomplished for the Glory of God. **Jesus, in the Matthew passage**, is before a crowd of people and teaches them how to pray—being urged on by his disciples (as recorded in the Book of Luke): “Teach us to pray.” Two things will strike you in the **introduction to the Lord’s Prayer:** Jesus talks about

“going to your room” to pray. Jesus may mean that literally—Come away from the hustle and bustle of life and be alone with God for a while. But just as important, is our attitude of humility; listening for what God has to say, rather than us constantly speaking and asking and not listening. God is looking for an attitude of humility rather than an attitude of pride. Now I know you probably have questions about the Lord’s Prayer—why do we say “**debts**” and others say “**trespasses.**” And what does “hallowed be thy name” mean? If you want the answers to those question, you have to come to the Children’s/Pastor Class after Fellowship today. I am teaching on the Lord’s Prayer, that was a “Commercial” if you didn’t pick that up.

ASKED TO PRAY PUBLICLY

Some of you have said to me, “I just can’t pray in public. I am going to let you in on a little secret, I used to be very scared about praying out loud. I was often afraid I would stumble over my words. A friend of mine gave me important advice: Just talk with God like you were “in your room.” The more you pray “in your room,” the easier it gets. Besides, Jesus basically says in Scripture: “Keep it simple.”

MY TIPS FOR PRAYING IN PUBLIC

Here are a Couple of my own tips for praying in public: **Pray prayers you have read in books or online.** The writers would be thrilled that you are using their words. That will give you good practice and make you less anxious about praying in public. If you are asked to pray in public, **and you know in advance, write out your prayer.** If you are asked **on the spur of the moment,** to pray in public, remember the **pattern ACTS** and pray it! You will be following the example of King Solomon and Jesus, the Messiah.

Lastly, **trust God to give you the words,** when you are asked or when you feel led to pray out loud. You will be amazed what words God put in your mouth, when your heart is humble and you simply want to talk with God for yourself and for others.

Prayer, communicating with God is critical in living and loving this life. It is all about our relationship with God. Let us be about Praying for ourselves, For people around us, For our world, **and Praying for the task that lies before us, Which most importantly is: loving God and loving others.** May we listen intently to what **God** has to say to us. **Prayer is just a conversation between Abba Daddy and His children.**